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Emily Wiegand

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The Whole World in Your Hands:
An Exploration of the Benefits Diverse Literature Has on Students

Emily Wiegand

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Dr. Allyson Ferrante, Thesis Director
Dr. John Kucich, Committee Member
Dr. Sarah Thomas, Committee Member

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The Current State of Affairs

The United States purports to be one of the world's leading nations in accepting its citizens' diverse backgrounds, however the country continues to misrepresent and ignore non-European ethnicities in its secondary education literary curriculums. Since independence, the United States has modeled its education system on that of its colonial predecessor, England. The US, although freeing itself from Europe, adopted a prescribed colonial canon of literature, still regarded as global classics, which depict white characters, living in white societies, recording white experiences as if they were universal. By using a collection of literature that teaches the colonial ideologies of white superiority, the United States operates as a modern colonial master suppressing not only the global population but also regulating its own non-white children to a secondary and inferior existence. The influence literature has on students' ethnic and racial identities, however, is often forgotten. Instead of providing an outlet for an exploration into regions, cultures, voices, opinions, and people that better reflect the diversity found in the United States, the current secondary education English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum functions on global exclusivity¹, often only offering a single token story from global societies outside of Western Europe (such as Africa, the Caribbean, Asian, etc.). In this way, literature used in the classroom promotes ethnic stereotypes of cultures and countries outside the United States. By only learning about a single experience of a particular culture, students become unable to

¹ Global exclusivity, in this instance, is the practice of ignoring non-Western societies (such as Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, etc.) in US education systems. Global inclusivity, however, is the practice of incorporating authentic representations of global societies in literary curriculums that promote equality among regions despite racial, ethnic, linguistic, sexual, cultural, etc. differences.

empathize, or accept the wholly unique complexity found within all individuals both internationally and nationally. Instead, they are taught an overgeneralized perspective of a group of people, clouding their ability to see the similarities they may have with countries, cultures, and people that challenge the current Eurocentric literary curriculum. Literature ultimately teaches students empathy through the use of multifaceted stories, making it essential for the United States to alter its English curriculum to one that promotes global inclusivity.

Education is used as a manipulative power to promote a singular definition of regional belonging, despite often being understood as unbiased truth. Beginning at the dawn of civilizations in places like Rome and China, and then being named in the 15th century when colonial empires used written letters to legitimize their supremacy over the conquered lands, literature has been used as a weapon to maintain colonial ideologies, or doctrines that establish Western individuals/cultures/countries as superior to those of non-Western regions. Knowing that indigenous people do not keep literary documentation of their culture, colonialists manipulated the way Western-European individuals viewed these native people by defining them in written texts. In this way colonial empires were able to create a definition for the people they were interacting with in terms that the native people could not read or understand. During the colonial era, language, and specifically literature, was used as a manipulative, deceptive, and powerful force that was able to persuade the Western regions into believing that native people were inferior to the colonial civilizations. This controlling use of literature continues to be seen throughout modern secondary ELA curriculums. Postcolonial theorist, Ania Loomba argues that,

“Even those literary texts that are, arguably, distant from or even critical of colonial ideologies can be made to serve colonial interests through education systems that devalue native literatures, and by Euro-centric critical practices

which insist on certain Western texts being the makers of superior culture and value” (Loomba 75).

Her analysis of the classic types of literature used in education systems, such as *The Great Gatsby*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Heart of Darkness*, claims that any literature within a curriculum can be manipulated into promoting Western, and specifically, colonial, understandings of the world². Current literary education models, that heavily use Western-European and white American texts, then, promote a colonial agenda that teaches a singular means of national/cultural belonging in the United States that not all residents can ascribe to. Instead of using literature to celebrate and accept the wide range of diversity within the US borders, literary curriculums create social norms that exclude the majority of its students.

The United States’ English curriculum generates a practice of exclusion within schools by solely teaching Western literature that ignores the majority of the global population. Despite the US’s ethnic and racial demographics becoming increasingly diverse, literary curriculums continue to mirror those of a colonial Western existence. Specifically, the literature used predominantly illustrates white, Western men living in Northern European nations³ rather than those of multi-cultural students living in modern United States. Rather than embracing the multiethnic existence of the nation by incorporating global literature, or stories that discuss a multitude of cultures and identities throughout the world, into its frameworks, many creators of English curriculums across the country claim that they “do not see color” and instead continue to

² These colonial understandings of the world teach Western-European superiority, non-Western/native/indigenous inferiority, and promote exclusion within various realms of society (such as education, media, advertisement, etc.) for people of non-Western decent. Colonial understandings of the world embody the belief that anything of value is created in Western Europe.

³ Examples of classic (and well-known) Western texts and authors used in the US literary curriculum include Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Shakespeare, *Moby Dick*, *Grapes of Wrath*, and the *Great Gatsby*. This is not to say that these writers and literature should not be taught, but rather that they should not be the only literature offered in any US school district.

only teach the “classic” Western canon of literature (Milner 394). Urban education scholar H. Richard Milner, however, refutes this common defense by arguing that,

“A statement such as, ‘I don’t see color’ reveals a privileged position that refuses to legitimize racial identifications that are very important to people of color and are often used to justify inaction and perpetuation of the status quo” (Milner 394).

The commonly taught literary curriculums, according to Milner, are structured around white privilege and the refusal to legitimize racial identities other than that of white individuals. By using the justification “I don’t see color” and continuing to litter literary curriculums with Western literature, educators ultimately ignore the existence of non-Western individuals, emphasizing through their curriculums that their ethnicities, cultures, races, and identities do not matter. This whitewashed version of a “classic” literary curriculum eliminates non-Western communities from secondary education and defines them as inferior by way of their exclusion in academia. In this way, the US perpetuates the colonial use of literature in that instead of promoting empathy and compassion for a multitude of countries, people, cultures, and lifestyles it teaches the practice of colonial exclusion.

The absence of non-colonial canons of literature in literary curriculums has created a culture of silence instead of inclusion. Although modern citizens often believe the world to be past colonialism, the remnants of its existence continue to take hold of the supposedly postcolonial space⁴. In order reach true postcoloniality, global citizens would have to acknowledge and challenge the colonial ideologies (such as racism, white superiority, social

⁴ Chronologically the world is past colonialism. Ideologically, however, this is not true. To be ideologically postcolonial a nation must rid itself of the colonial mindset and come to understand and accept that all regions are wholly unique and equal despite racial, ethnic, sexual, national, etc. differences.

hierarchies, cultural silencing, and exclusion of difference) that continue to govern modern societies. Due to this lack of acknowledgement, however, literary curriculums that continue to educate the next generations along colonial standards go unopposed. In Jean Rhys' novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, protagonist Antoinette struggles with finding where she belongs in her society because of the dichotomy between embodying colonial definitions of femininity⁵ and her identity as a white creole⁶. Instead of challenging the colonial standards that are forcing her to conform, Antoinette instead embodies a motto she has carried throughout the entirety of her life; "It was like that morning when I found the dead horse. Say nothing and it may not be true" (Rhys 35). Antoinette, although having to rid herself of her culture, experiences, and memories of her life in Jamaica has been culturally molded into ascribing to colonial ideologies in order to conform to the identity of a white Western woman. Similarly, modern citizens continue to perpetuate colonial ideologies because of their remaining silent as non-Western individuals continue to be excluded from literary curriculums. Only once the silence is broken can multidimensional and inclusive literature that challenges the US's current resurgence of public racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and intolerance, be incorporated into education systems to teach empathy and acceptance for all identities.

Continuing Colonization

People across the world believe that because the global colonial era ended in the mid-20th century, all countries are now postcolonial. In its inception, colonialism was the physical domination over a nation and its people to gain territory for the colonial empires. What is often

⁵ The ideal image of colonial femininity defined a woman as being fair skinned with Western features, dressed in Western-European attire, soft spoken, and dutiful to her husband and family.

⁶ A white creole is a Caribbean descendent of European settlers who may be of mixed racial heritage, but not necessarily, and who's culture is Caribbean not European.

forgotten, however, is that colonialism did not succeed merely because of physical control over a land, but because of its reliance on the psychological manipulation of a colonized people's education and sense of self. Colonialism operates under the creation of a social hierarchy, meaning that colonial masters mold the native people of the colony into believing that because they are not Western, they are fundamentally inferior. What prohibits the world from truly ending colonialism are the ideologies still promoted in education systems. Nations across the globe continue to teach ideologies that abide by colonial beliefs that promote non-Western inferiority. The world struggles to move past a colonial state because of the adherence to teach Western history in a dominant and exclusive way throughout all facets of education systems: language arts, social studies, taught literature, history courses, math examples, etc.

Through the continuation of a singular, Eurocentric⁷ literary curriculum, the United States continues the promotion of the colonial History over a multitude of histories. Caribbean theorist Édouard Glissant defines History (with a capital H) as a, “highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone ‘made’ the history of the World” (Glissant 64). Beginning when colonial empires “discovered”⁸ the new world, History has functioned on the belief that what colonial empires found in their explorations did not exist prior to their contact. Due to the fact that most indigenous people from these non-Western regions did not keep written documents of their history, but rather oral ones, Western superpowers were able

⁷ Eurocentrism is the belief that Western European nations are inherently superior to nations unable to identify as such. This concept was created during the colonial time period in order to ensure the colonial empire's dominance over its colonies. This was and is currently maintained in the colonial education systems that govern both colonial empires and colonies.

⁸ Discovered, in this instance, is written with quotation marks around it because although it is often the verb used to describe what explorers, conquistadors, and colonial empires did when arriving in the New World, it is misused. When Europeans voyaged to these lands, although new to them, they did not discover anything as it had already been found, settled, governed, and lived on by indigenous communities. The use of the word “discover” is just another way that colonial empires created an illusion that life did not exist prior to their arrival and that the land was theirs to take since it had never been found before.

to eliminate their cultural memories by redefining these areas into a new identity that fit into the understanding of European superiority and non-Western inferiority. History functions then on the dialectic relationship between the colonizer and colonized; the colonizer cannot exist as superior without making the colonized inferior. In order to define themselves, the colonial powers had to define the Other (or non-Western individuals). Similarly, current secondary education literary curriculums reduce the complexity of the Other in only offering a singular non-Western story to define this multitude of people. What is then overlooked, though, is that the Other is an integral part to the United States. Instead of offering a globally and culturally inclusive curriculum that works to enhance students' understanding and acceptance of all regions, the literature used continues the mindset that Western-European texts are the only ones of value and worth teaching in school systems. If able to dismantle the current curriculum, literary histories (with a lower case "h") could be used to combat the common understanding of the global past because of its inherent nature to incorporate regional histories from around the world. Specifically, histories uncover and voice the cultural stories of all global individuals who had their experiences silenced by colonial empires. The current literary curriculum in the US, then, ignores literatures ability to teach empathetic inclusion of all identities, and rather, uses it as a tool to teach the next generation of US students that to be a part of the United States one must value Western superiority and colonial History.

By only using a select group of Western texts, colonial educations ultimately exclude the legitimacy of the majority of its students. Only able to learn about the History of the world, students of non-Western cultural and ethnic backgrounds are unable to learn or connect with literary texts present within the common colonial curriculums. In this way academia ignores their interpretations of the world, further marginalizing them into a role that does not belong in

education. Tunisian social scholar Albert Memmi argues in his critical essay, “Situations of the Colonized”, that the continued degradation of once colonized people is a result of an enduring colonial education system. He writes, “This educational void, a result of social inadequacy, thus perpetuates that same inadequacy, damaging one of the essential dimensions of the colonized individual... The colonized seems condemned to lose his memory” (Suárez 13). By neglecting to incorporate literature, either realistic or imaginary, that embodies the diverse histories of students into all literary curriculums, colonial educations invalidate non-Western students’ experiences, creating an academic space that defines them as not belonging. Despite the benefits literature could offer to all students, (like its ability to teach empathy, advocate for the legitimacy of all peoples both socially and academically, as well as expose all students to lifestyles they may not have ever come into contact with previously) the current curriculum prohibits multicultural and diverse stories from ever being a part of colonial educations. Rather these texts are left excluded from the canon in order to maintain the colonial ideology of Western superiority over non-Western individuals.

By defining non-Western regions as inferior to Western cultures, the United States maintains colonial claims over non-Western region by defining it to US students through the use of Eurocentric ideologies. The United States, through the use of singular narratives of non-Western realities, acts as a European colonizer by taking ownership of the regions’ existences in its education system. Instead of regarding the regions as being legitimate and significant to the global understanding, the US has adopted the colonial practices of marginalizing groups of people through their misrepresentation in writing in order to promote Western superiority. Being one of the most influential modes of communication, the literature used in the stagnant English

curriculum shapes the way generations of US students understand non-Western regions and people. Ania Loomba suggests that,

“The colonial contact is not just ‘reflected’ in the language or imaginary of literary text, it is not just a back drop or ‘context’ against which human dramas are enacted, but a central aspect of what these texts have to say about identity, relationship and culture” (Loomba 65).

Loomba argues that the literature produced and taught in an colonial nation does not merely reflect its beliefs in a distant manner, but rather has the value system seamlessly integrated into all works of writing. Similarly, the works included in academic curriculums are chosen specifically to define the ways in which US citizens must act in order to fit into the preexisting social system (which ultimately not every citizen can meet). Through its chosen literature, the US literary curriculum continues to misuse the benefits of literature and instead continue to label and misrepresent non-Western identities in an attempt to fully legitimize the US in its white and Western superiority.

Due to the persisting colonial ideologies in education systems, non-Western students and later adult citizens of the nation are conditioned to believe themselves burdens to the broader society. Although physically living in the same nation as white, ethnically Western European individuals, non-Western citizens often feel as if they are ignored in and excluded from the dominant culture; in this way it often feels as if they are living in an alternate world full of discrimination and social inequalities. Racial theorist W.E.B DuBois, in his text *The Souls of Black Folk* affirms this feeling of non-belonging observing that,

“Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly

framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half- hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, How does it feel to be a problem? they say, I know an excellent colored man in my town; or, I fought at Mechanicsville; or, Do not these Southern outrages make your blood boil? At these I smile, or am interested, or reduce the boiling to a simmer, as the occasion may require. To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word” (DuBois).

DuBois’s commentary on the façade given to non-Western individuals by white people illustrates a social barrier created between the two groups that remains impenetrable without first coming to the realization of equality. This underlying tone of uncomfortable racism, generated by the perpetuated colonial ideologies, leaves all students unable to comprehend human nature outside of ethnic stereotypes learned through Eurocentric education systems. This divide between students, and ultimately adults if taught properly, can be eliminated if able to fully come to terms with the wholly unique nature of all humans. Instead of offering a singular representation of cultural, racial, and geographical existences, diverse literature can allow students the ability to explore all realms of their own society and world, coming to a point of empathy for all.

The US English curriculum neglects to recognize complex and multifaceted identities because of the United State’s own inability to recognize global ethnicities within its borders. The US has a tendency to “go color blind” when it comes to discussing racial inequalities, believing that it is more important to abide by the status quo than to address the misrepresentation of its own citizens. Literary and cultural scholar, Anne Anlin Cheng, author of *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* theorizes that,

“While much critical energy has been directed toward deconstructing categories such as gender and race, less attention has been given to the ways in which individuals and communities remain invested in maintaining such categories, even when such identities prove to be prohibitive or debilitating” (Cheng 6-7).

Cheng argues that although colonial social constructions prove to be debilitating to global citizens and their attempt to be seen as legitimate, there is a demand by Western nations to maintain colonial definitions of once colonized regions. The US’s refusal to realistically depict non-Western nations in literary curriculums is a direct reflection of Cheng’s argument of the nation’s reliance on the colonial oppression of others in order to validate its own existence as a Western superpower. If the United States were to fully accept non-Western and multicultural individuals the country would then have to question its own definition of belonging. Instead of reconstructing its curriculum model to incorporate inclusive and multicultural texts that promote empathetic inclusion, however, the required US English curriculum remains deprived of global literature and instead maintains its whitewashed academic system, promoting exclusion within its culture.

The Dangers of One Story

The Common Core State Standards, used as an educational baseline for literary curriculums nationally, offers a list of recommended literature that ignores the diversity found within the United States. Although the US does not have a required national literary curriculum, the Common Core State offer state departments and teachers a recommended set of curriculum guidelines and texts to use with students. Specifically, in Standard 10: Range, Quality, and Complexity of Student Reading there are three factors used to measure the complexity of a text;

they are qualitative evaluation⁹, quantitative evaluation¹⁰, and matching reader to text and task¹¹. With these factors, the Common Core also gives guidelines to a range of texts such as: stories, drama, poetry, and literary nonfiction. Despite the fact that all of these standards are left open ended to allow for a multitude of texts to be used in the classroom, Common Core offers a list of recommended texts that maintain Eurocentric belief systems in that the majority of the literature come from authors and story lines of Western-European individuals and the texts that offer another cultural perspective only discuss stories of slavery and immigration. For the middle school leveled students some of the texts include: *The Adventure of Tom Sawyer*, *Dragon Wings*, *Little Women*, “Letters on Thomas Jefferson”, and *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, an American Slave*. These texts, although beginning the process of incorporating diverse literature into the classroom, ignore the multidimensional identities found within United States citizens and instead make a single story about one race the only representation students experience. This promotion of the national standards, then, does a disservice to teachers and students in that it perpetuates the colonial definitions of minority groups instead of offering a whole and well-rounded understanding of modern individuals’ complexity.

The lack of diverse literature integrated into the English curriculum signifies to United States students that these token stories are foreign ornamentation to the United States’ identity, rather than an integral part. Despite the fact that all students, being white, of color, or identifying as any non-Western region, are all a part of the US’ cultural makeup, only certain racial and ethnic demographics are celebrated in literary curriculum. Specifically, Western authors and

⁹ Qualitative evaluation of a text analyzes the “levels of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands” (Common 57).

¹⁰ Quantitative evaluation of a text analyzes the “readability measures and other scores of text complexity” (Common 57).

¹¹ Matching reader to text and task analyzes “reader variables (such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences) and task variables (such as purpose and the complexity generated by the task assigned and the question posed)” (Common 57).

literary characters are often the only demographic identified as contributing meaningful literature to academia while non-Western works are often seen as additive features. By defining Western literature to be necessary to the core curriculum and non-Western stories to be elective, the US' literary curriculum teaches that individuals who identify with these global regions are, too, unnecessary to academia. Pedagogical theorist Gloria Ladson-Billings affirms this feeling of exclusion in non-white students by arguing that the US English curriculum perpetuates, "the negative effects of the dominant culture. The negative effects are brought about, for example, by not seeing one's history, culture, or background represented in textbooks or curriculums" (Milner 395). Ladson-Billings argues that the current English curriculum is not only exclusive but also damaging to students' understanding of themselves and others due to the lack of global recognition in academia. Instead of viewing themselves as an integral piece in the broader puzzle of national identity, ethnically non-Western students believe themselves to be an unnecessary accessory to the national identity. Due to the omission of their ethnic backgrounds in the literature taught, students of non-Western ancestry believe themselves to be outsiders to their own nation, belonging only to regions deemed inferior by the Western world.

The singular and misrepresented identifications of non-Western cultures promote ethnic stereotyping among United States students. Often in US classrooms students read only one story meant to represent the vast non-Western regions (such as Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, indigenous communities, etc.), creating a single understanding of the expansive and multidimensional cultures. World-renowned novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche attempts to advocate for the detrimental effects a singular reading of a group of people has on students in her TED talk "The Danger of a Single Story". In it she argues that, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are

incomplete. They make one story the only story” (Adichie). Although often the global literature chosen for the US literary curriculum holds some truth to its representation of a region, this singular-dimensional type of education often leads to inadequate characterizations and understandings of cultures, people, and existences. Each piece of global literature, then, teaches students one way of life for a particular region, which ultimately creates stereotypes that not all individuals from that area can or want to identify with. Instead of promoting a multidimensional way of thinking about identities found in global regions through multicultural literature and its lessons in empathy and acceptance, the United States maintains the colonial ideology that each non-Western region contains only one, singular definition of existence in its education system.

Colonial educations, although predominantly found in literary curriculums, ultimately transcend classroom walls and infiltrate the social constructs of modern society. Originating in many Western regions, colonial social structures are based on the foundations of a plantation system¹². Despite the fact that the time of active colonialism and slave plantations has passed, colonial ideologies continue to manifest themselves within social, political, economic, religious, and education realms of the world. Specifically, a system of binaries¹³ continues to plague society, forcing individuals to conform rather than embrace their whole identities. In Gisele Pineau’s novel *The Drifting of Spirits*, although no character ever received a formal colonial education, they all continue to perpetuate the colonial ideologies of their society, directly reflecting the realities of many nations. Instead of accepting and celebrating the diversity within

¹² The plantation system is a social hierarchy that places white plantation-owning males as superior to all other human beings. Specifically this structure maintains black inferiority in order to ensure that the power of the elite white class remains in tact.

¹³ Social binaries are a product of the binary system created by colonial ideologies. Binary systems are singular definitions of existence that opposed one another. For example, under colonial ideologies a single individual cannot be both European and Caribbean; a clear distinction is made between the two in order to preserve the power of a select group of people (usually the colonial empire). Similarly, colonial education restricts itself to teaching material that promotes colonial thought and condemns those who attempt to challenge its very existence.

Haute-Terre, characters are left, “like a zombie, stripped of [their] memory and which, in a thousand different places, look[ing] for the memory of a former life secreted in the heart of impenetrable fragments” (Pineau 157-158) because of society’s active refusal to accept their creole identities¹⁴. In living in an imaginary society that ascribes to colonial ideologies, and reflects many modern and realistic societies, Pineau’s characters are left seemingly lifeless because of their inability to belong in a binary social system. Colonial mindsets, as evidenced through this text, then, are taught in all aspects of a colonially structured society; rather than just being a code learned through structured education, colonial ideologies are perpetuated through an entire culture. The only way to combat this larger teacher of colonial ideologies, then, is through multicultural stories that blur the lines between social binaries and evoke empathetic thought that challenges societal norms.

The inability to experience and learn about a multitude of cultures psychologically affects non-Western students and their self-concepts. Literature offers a reflection of the society in which it is written. For this reason, reading literature is not just a means for pleasure, but rather it is a mode to teach students about their own realities in a safe and productive manner. Therefore, the literature used in the classroom heavily influences the way students understand their own existence as well as the realities of those around them, making it a necessity to validate the multitude of lives found in the United States. What often happens, though, is multicultural literature is left out of literary curriculums, leaving all students unable to place and understand non-Western individuals in a world outside of the generated ethnic stereotypes. Cultural psychologist Steven Heine identifies this feeling of non-belonging through two psychological

¹⁴ To be creole is to be a mixture of races, cultures, and/or languages that constitute a new and wholly legitimate identity. It is often an ambiguous term because of the multiplicity of forms it can take and is therefore ignored by societies who ascribe to colonial ideologies because of its inability to fit into the rigid binary systems.

phenomena: stereotype threat¹⁵ and identity denial¹⁶. Both, although two distinct psychological states, result in non-Western individuals' being unable to act as themselves because of ethnic stereotypes created in a culture through the perpetuated colonial educations. Instead of feeling included, individuals are left constantly attempting to fit into predetermined colonial identifications that either confirm a cultural stereotype or drastically opposes it. What often occurs, though, is students are left unable to feel a sense of belonging because of their constant identity suppression and their inability to ever validate their existence as wholly unique through culturally inclusive literary representations.

Unable to connect with the literary characters in their education systems and then ultimately believing they do not fit into the broader society, students are only left with the options of not belonging or assimilating as best they can into the dominant culture. Anne Anlin Cheng, in her theoretical text *The Melancholy of Race*, diagnoses non-Western individual's feelings of obligation to culturally assimilate as a melancholy of race. Specifically, she describes this mental condition as a "haunting" of the individuals' identity. She argues that,

"Cultural assimilation may thus be said to be a form of haunting, whereby the dream of the socially immaculate body simultaneously intjects itself and provokes a host of hypochondriacal responses. The double malady of melancholia for the racial-ethnic subject *is* the condition of having to incorporate and encrypt both an impossible ideal and a denigrated self. More than any other identificatory disorders, racial melancholia speaks of a dream of perfection" (Cheng 72).

¹⁵ Steven Heine defines stereotype threat as "fear that one [a non-Western individual] might do something that will inadvertently confirm a negative stereotype about one's group" (Heine 274).

¹⁶ Steven Heine also defines identity denial as a psychological disorder, "in which an individual's cultural identity is called into question because he or she doesn't seem to match the prototype of the culture" (Heine 273).

In her theory of cultural assimilation, Cheng explains that by attempting to embody a dominant culture that otherwise renders an individual as an outsider, non-Western citizens are left with fragmented identities because of their own attempt to diminish the value of their ethnic identity. In doing so, individuals work to fit into a predetermined colonial identity that they inherently cannot attain because of their inability to identify as a white, Western individual; they begin feeling “haunted” by their own identities as they are only able to see it in an inferior and ethnically stereotyped way. With this, their attempt to stifle their true identity to fit into the dominant culture leaves them not only a continued outsider of the colonially prescribed elite, but they are also left unable to understand themselves as wholly unique individuals. Further, by leaving non-Western individual devoid from ever seeing themselves as having legitimate identities through multicultural literature in school, they are left unable to visualize themselves as belonging to any academic setting, rendering it an irrelevant entity in their lives.

By only offering a singular, whitewashed education system, students become limited to not only their ability to succeed but also their perspective of the world. Like the danger of a single literary story for vast regions, a singular education system segregates the student population into those able to connect with the material at hand, and those who cannot. Educator and theorist Mike Rose, in his piece *Lives on the Boundary*, comments on this exclusion through his own experience as a member of a minority group and teacher. Rose argues that academia is currently one of the most exclusive dimensions of society. He gives the example through his own experience with minority students who have been labeled as remedial, illiterate, or having a language deficiency. He explains that often they begin to self-identify as having a defect, shutting down from every believing they can be a part of academic scholarship (Rose). In order to alter this reality of exclusion, however, Rose advocates for differentiated learning instruction

in order meet the needs of a diverse range of students. He acknowledges that there is not just one body of students and therefore there cannot be only one form of education. (Rose). Further, due to the fact that the United States, and really all globalized and modern societies, continue to grow in cultural, racial, sexual, and linguistic diversity, the literature and language used in literary curriculums should be multifaceted in order to include and meet the needs of all students learning under such education system. Through students' ability to explore literatures that speak to the ever-diversifying world they live in, literary curriculums offer an empathetic and all-inclusive outlook that directly challenges the singular education currently used.

STEM isn't a Panacea

In many US schools literary curriculums are viewed as unnecessary additives to school systems determined to prepare students in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). With technological innovations constantly happening throughout the world, it is a common misconception that the best way to prepare the next generation for the future is to create education curriculums that heavily rely on the STEM fields; what a strictly STEM education neglects to offers students is the skills to think critically about the social world around them. Without having the ability to learn about the world, and its multitudes of peoples and cultures, through literature, students and ultimately citizens become unable to think critically about their society. Educational theorist Paulo Freire in his co-authored text *Reading the Word and the World* affirms this necessity to enhance students literacy in his claim that language, and therefore literature, is inherently interconnected with reality. Through this medium, then, he argues that literacy offers an emancipation from the oppressed as it is a mode of learning that anyone can participate with, make meaning of, create, and transform (Freire). Instead of being viewed as an

unnecessary piece of education, literary curriculums must be given the same weight as STEM as it allows students the ability to visualize their own realities in the lives of characters, bettering their chances of overcoming the internal and external challenges that plague them and the people around them. Only through this exploratory and multidimensional education will students actually be prepared to live in a multicultural and globalized world.

If students are never taught boundary breaking, imagination, or creation, through their literary curriculums, they will never be able to do it and instead will further perpetuate colonial social systems. Education acts as a reflection of what the broader society deems valuable for the next generation to understand. Literary curriculums that abide by the structure of colonial educations, then, currently promote Western superiority and the importance of maintaining social binaries that separate individuals rather than bringing them together. When analyzing the colonial educations, Minority Studies Scholar James A. Banks observes that, “both children of color and White children develop a ‘White bias’ by the time they enter kindergarten” (Milner 392). The “white bias”, perpetuated by the dominant culture, emphasizes universal white superiority, teaching even young children that to be a valuable member of the world, one must try to meet the standards of a Eurocentric belief system. This, though, is unattainable by anyone other than individuals of Western decent. If able to overturn current colonial literary educations, however, a wholly diverse literary curriculum can offer as a tool to enhance the minds of students. Specifically, lessons on multicultural literature that promote empathy and acceptance for all global citizens allow students to explore regions unlike their own and further understand the importance of challenging the colonial limitations present in one’s own society; this kind of literature, which cannot be found in a heavily STEM dominated curriculum, sparks innovative

change in its readers, further challenging the very colonial ideologies that govern society and render this field of study unnecessary for student learning and growth.

Literary curriculums offer students a chance to think critically and creatively about the world around them. Literature allows readers to visualize and engage with worlds that are otherwise nonexistent in their societies outside of the confines of the book. In this way, diverse literature imparts creativity and an acceptance of diversity within people, thoughts, realms, characters and answers in its readers. If able to do so, readers learn the benefits of a multidimensional society in both familiar and unfamiliar worlds. Heather Smyth argues even further that in challenging the colonial binary systems there are, “the possibilities for collective renewal¹⁷ [that] lie in a recognition of diversity, for “there are so many paths” (Brodber 71), “there are ways and ways of knowing” (Brodber 76), “there are alternatives” (Brodber 105) and there are “other worlds” (91)” (Smyth 12). By eliminating colonial educations that emphasize the importance of conformity into the singular, Western-European definition of living, rather than an acceptance of uniqueness, society would be one step closer to a state of inclusivity for all United States citizens. Although not addressed directly, Smyth’s assertion lends to the importance of teaching multicultural and diverse; through an imaginative and realistic realm that emphasize realities that are both similar and unlike to all citizens, students are able to learn the importance of challenging oppressive social structures in order to create harmony. Similarly, if able to accept the diverse histories of characters in the literary worlds, readers will have the tools to recognize the multidimensional existences of people in the physical world.

¹⁷ “Collective renewal”, in this context, refers to the cultural healing that occurs when colonial ideologies are eliminated from society and instead replaced with a recognition, acceptance, and celebration of the diverse, and wholly unique, identities of a nation’s citizens. This collective renewal, too, paves the way for a society to become postcolonial.

Why Inclusion is the Answer

World literature remains unrequired by most secondary education schools, yet the texts that could be used to create these classes offer a much more realistic and authentic depiction of global regions outside of Western nations. Understood to be elective and unnecessary to graduate as a well-studied high school student, authentic non-Western stories often go untaught due to the colonial stigma that works from these regions do not offer contemporary or realistic depictions of life. Contradicting these colonial conceptions of inferiority in non-Western regions, however, are influential stories that depict basic human experiences such as: the turmoil of love, gender constructions and the opposition of them, the adoration a mother has for her children and the struggles of parenting, individuality, authenticity in one's self, homesickness, and finding one's self-identity. These humanistic themes are what define global existence, which includes both Western and non-Western people. It is not that works depicting global regions in a humane manner do not exist, rather the singular representation of non-Western countries in the US literary curriculums stem from the US's fear of accepting multifaceted individuals who do not easily fit into the preconceived colonial boxes. However, if able to tap into the immense resources of global literature that teaches humanity in a way that can connect with all students, literary curriculums will set the foundation for future generations that having empathy for others is the best way to exist in a globalized society.

Through literary characters students are able to see a new perspective of the world, allowing them to reflect on their own realities and come to conclusions about human nature. Often only being exposed to colonial text, students become unable to experience and come to accept the multidimensional nature of the world. Through multicultural and imaginative literature, though, they are able to see reflections of themselves in a multitude of characters. In

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, the main character Oscar uses supernatural and fantasy literature to create a world for himself that eliminates colonial binaries placed on the rest of Dominican men. In his society, to be a stereotypical Dominican man, one must be a player, act tough all the time, and exude raw masculinity in all aspect of his life. Oscar, despite being ostracized by the rest of the community because of his differences, creates his own world in which he belongs as a wholly unique individual. When describing Oscar, the narrator, Yunior, explains, “Do you want to know what sign the fool put on our dorm door? *Speak, friend, and enter*. In fucking Elvish!” (Díaz 172). Although unable to fully accept and understand Oscar, Yunior explains to the reader how Oscar has been able to find his ability to empathize with others in literature and, in doing so, come to identify all other human beings as “friend” no matter the cultural, linguistic, or ethnic differences. Through this multicultural text, readers are able to not only see the benefits of wholly accepting individuals who may not fit into colonial boxes, but are also able to see reflections of their colonial societies in Yunior. In a safe way, readers are able to see a reflection of their own colonial mindset and learn to find empathy for differences through the journey and eyes of Yunior. The benefits of reading multidimensional literature that richly portrays a nation’s citizens, like *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, then, is that it allows for all readers to begin to question their colonial reality and learn of an alternative that offers acceptance and empathy for all.

Although often used as a deceptive power, literature can also be the tool to challenge colonial oppression and fuel resistant change. Nobel Prize winner and world-renowned literary scholar Derek Walcott explores this idea of defiance toward colonial thought in his poem “The Schooner Flight”. Following the experiences of Shabine, a mixed-race Caribbean seaman, “Schooner Flight highlights the complex identity that defines non-Western individuals living in a

colonial space. In it the speaker explains, “I’m just a red nigger who love the sea/ I had a sound colonial education/ I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me/ and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation” (Walcott 40-43). Shabine self-identifies himself in a transparent and whole way, but questions his own legitimacy in the colonial environment in which he lives. Although posed as a question, the final phrase, “and either I am nobody, or I’m a nation” directly comments on the unnatural nature of ideologies perpetuated through colonial educations (43). If thinking with a mind conditioned by a colonial education, Shabine would be left unaware of where he fit into the world because he cannot fit into a colonially prescribed, singular definition of self. What readers can take away from this line, however, is that there is more than one option when living in a colonial space. Instead of only being able to see oneself as an illegitimate non-Western individual, Walcott’s literature offers both Western and non-Western individuals a chance to contradict the colonial mindset and view all individuals as wholly legitimate in all their complexities. Literature that grants this empathetic alternative to colonial educations is what will transition generations’ thoughts on identity from fragmented to whole no matter the ethnic combinations that are found within a single individual.

Knowing the imperative need to improve students’ global awareness during a time of increased diversity in the United States, organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) are molding their mission and standards to meet these needs. Combining the thoughts, opinions, and ideas of teachers across the nation, NCTE has made strides towards more inclusive literary curriculums by promoting that the importance of literature is to have, “students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world” and to ensure, “personal fulfillment” (NCTE). According to the national body of English Language Arts teachers, it has become a

necessity for academics to not be about fact absorption, but about relating what students learn to their broader community and world. Through the use of diverse literature in the classroom that better represents to students and population found within the United States students will have a better concept of where they fit into the world and how to have empathetic understanding for all of those around them.

Conclusion

The exclusion of whole groups of people, although prominent in the United State's dominant culture and literary curriculums, is a global disparity that functions on colonial ideologies that are continuously perpetuated in modern societies. Through the lack of multicultural recognition in education systems, Western nations teach immigrant and multicultural student populations to strip themselves of their previous identity and instead adopt the ideologies of their new home that promote uniformity and assimilation. In a globalized world full of multi-lingual and multi-ethnic individuals, Western education systems denounce the multiplicity of bilingual and non-Western students, and instead eliminate the possibility of preserving foreign linguistic and cultural tradition. Colonial education systems demand sole communicate through colonial languages such as: French, Spanish, Dutch, and English. This deprivation of cultural origin is also evident in the restrictive nature of self-expression in Western cultures; for instance, in France, female students are not permitted to wear hijabs in public school systems due to their symbolic representation of inaccurate ethnic stereotyping and stark opposition to colonial and white ideologies. The colonial mindset of existence has become a cultural epidemic of global stature, demanding an end to structural violence and discrimination. In a globalized world where often fear, hatred, and ignorance govern modern societies, it

becomes imperative for education systems to teach students the importance of empathetic understanding and inclusion of all humans. The integration of multicultural existences into education systems through empathetic literature offers as a cure to the colonial epidemic, allowing nations across the globe legitimize their citizens existences and offer equality for all.

Through the incorporation of native, diverse and inclusive literature that embraces all of the postcolonial family into global school systems, students will better understand both their national and personal identities, finally ridding themselves of colonial ideologies. Literature offers a photo album of a nation's family; it should reflect the complexity and diversity of the country along with representations of each individual as legitimately belonging. Young people being able to identify themselves in literature is crucial to their developing into full human beings who understand their place in the world they live in. St. Lucian writer Derek Walcott explains; "Break a vase, and the love that resembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape" (Walcott). Literature should act as the sealing to a completely emancipated national identity, which depends upon the nation's culture, history, and people as whole and legitimate. Literature teaches students to question their country's values, practices, and culture, which directly challenges and threatens the very colonial system educations often operate under. Students' inquiries will prepare and inspire the next generation of global leaders to challenge and revitalize their national ideals, enabling them to be completely postcolonial.

Book List for Teachers

Below is a list of fifty diverse books that offer a better representations of the multidimensional students found all over the world. This list encompasses stories that discuss diversity in culture, gender, sexuality, identity, nationality, physique, and ability. Further, these texts all foster similar themes of acceptance, empathy, and humanity for all.

Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1958. Print.

Things Fall Apart is a narrative that follows the life of fictional character Okonkwo, a famous African warrior from the Igbo people. This powerful narrative explores Okonkwo's resistance to the British colonial empire that works effortlessly to devalue and eliminate any traces of his Igbo culture. Taking place during the colonial time period, this book emphasizes the importance of standing up for one's beliefs and communities.

Agostin, Marjorie. *I Lived on Butterfly Hill*. New York: Simon & Schuster Book, 2014. Print.

Based on true events during Pinochet's dictatorship, *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* is a novel about the resilience, exile, loss, and hope that Celeste must face when her home becomes unsafe and she is forced to flee from the danger that seeps into Valparaiso, Chile.

Alexander, Kwame. *The Crossover*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. Print.

Things look great for Josh Bell, he and his twin brother Jordan are leading his school's basketball team to the championship game. Then, Jordan meets a girl, and loses interest in basketball . . . and his brother. Alone and angry, Josh makes a terrible mistake that lands him on the sidelines for the rest of the season, then his dad falls gravely ill. In rap style verses, Josh shows his passion for family, basketball, and poetry.

Alexi, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2009. Print.

Arnold (Junior) Spirit is a part-time Indian. While he has grown up and lived on the Indian reservation of Wellpinit all of his life, he longs to escape in fear of never amounting to anything. If he stays, he will be trapped in a life he does not belong in; if he leaves his tribe will condemn him as a traitor. Will Junior have the strength to betray his tribe and follow his dreams?

Alvarez, Julia. *Return to Sender*. New York: Random House, Inc., 2009. Print.

A beautiful and timely story, this novel follows the unexpected friendship that comes between Tyler, a United States citizen who's father owns a farm, and Mari, and Mexican migrant who's family has come to find work. Constantly fearing that the government will discover the family, Mari and Tyler's story highlight the humanity that comes with all immigrants and the friendship that can come despite vast differences. This story resonates with modern events and will leave readers with a new, and more understanding perspective of what it means to be a modern day immigrant.

Applegate, Katherine. *Home of the Brave*. New York: An Imprint of Macmillan, 2007. Print.

Following the life of Kek, an African immigrant to the United States, readers are able to see the

strength it takes to journey to a new nation that doesn't speak your language. A heartwarming collection of poems, this story reveals the love, compassion, and empathy needed for all immigrants to find a sense of home in their new place of refuge. Readers are able to step into the shoes of a language learner and come to find that they too can relate to Kek despite the obvious differences.

Boyne, John. *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. New York: Random House Children's Books, 2006. Print.

A narrative following the unlikely friendship between a German soldier's son and a Jewish boy in the heart of WWII, this novel illustrates the blind empathy and acceptance that comes with childhood innocence. Written from the perspective of a nine year old boy, readers are able to see the true simplicity that comes with breaking down social barriers and finding a friend in anyone you meet.

Brown, Skila. *Caminar*. Somerville: Candlewick Press, 2014. Print.

Written in free verse, this narrative follows the journey of a young boy trying to survive Guatemala's Civil War in 1981. Separated from his family, this story of resilience illustrates just how much courage it takes to be a survivor in a land destined for destruction.

Cisneros, Sandra. *House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991. Print

Cisneros' novel is comprised of various vignettes that follow the life of Esperanza Cordero in a Hispanic quarter of Chicago. Coming from a family of Mexican immigrants, Esperanza is faced with racism, fear, and uncertainty of belonging in her community. Although a minority citizen, Esperanza's coming of age story discussed emotions, tribulations, and experiences that all students can relate to.

Conkling, Winifred. *Sylvia & Aki*. New York: Random House, Inc., 2001. Print.

This novel follows the strange intersection of two girls live. Ending up together on a farm in Southern California, this story reveals the struggles that came during the time of Mendez vs. Westminster School District court case that ultimately desegregated California schools for Latino children. Based on true events, this narrative emphasizes the importance of remembering this time and battle that came with academic equality.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. *Bud, Not Buddy*. New York: Random House Children's Books, 1999. Print.

Bud, a motherless boy living in 1936 Flint Michigan is on the run. Although isolated and alone, he is determined to find his father from the clues left behind from his mother. In this novel of determination, hope, and childhood innocence, Bud reveals to the rest of the world just how much power love can have.

Draper, Sharon M. *Stella by Starlight*. New York: Antheneum Books for Young Readers, 2015. Print.

Taking place in Southern United States during segregation, this novel follows the life of young Stella as the Ku Klux Klan reappears in her society. During a time of violent racism, this story highlights the battle between bravery and prejudice in an attempt to reach total equality.

Fleischman, Paul. *Seedfolks*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1997. Print.

Written from thirteen diverse voices, this novel tells the story of how a garden transformed an entire community. Living in an inner-city environment with complete strangers who do not seem to care about the state of their surroundings, this novel shed light on the true sense of life that can come from the hope granted by nature.

Frost, Helen. *Salt*. Harrisonburg: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 2013. Print.

Set in 1812 on Indian Territory, this novel follows the story of Anikwa and James, two twelve year old boys, who have found friendship in one another despite the differences between them. When tensions arise between traitors and Nativ Americans, though, the boys' friendship is tested and they must decide where their true loyalties lie.

Giovanni, Nikki. *The 100 Best African Poems*. Naperville: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2010. Print.

A collection of what editor Nikki Giovanni believed to be the 200 best African poems, this text offers poetry that spans from both modern and past eras. Celebrating authors like Langston Hughes, Tupac, Gwendolyn Brooks, and so many more, this collection speaks to the vastness that is the African American culture.

Grimes, Nikki. *Bronx Masquerade*. New York: Dial, 2002. Print

Tyrone wants to quit school until he starts performing at "Open Mic Friday's" for Mr. Ward's English class. Set in Bronx, New York, the students in Mr. Ward's class come from all different backgrounds (gang life, teen motherhood, racial tensions), but come together by using poetry as an outlet to share their stories. Written in a fast-paced style, the book switches between characters' journal entries and their own poems of who they are and who they want to be.

Halse Anderson, Laurie. *Wintergirls*. New York: Penguin Group, 2009. Print.

A heartbreaking story of two best friends, Lia and Cassie, this novel highlights the destruction, despair, haunting, and isolation that come with modern eating disorders. Follow Lia and her journey to recovery after the suffering from the ultimate loss with little left to live for except for hope.

Hunt, Lynda Mullaly. *Fish in a Tree*. New York: Puffin Books, 2015. Print.

Ally is smart enough to fool all of the people around her. She appears to be an average, trouble-making teenager but what everyone is missing is her inability to read. At every new school she attends, she is able to hide her illiteracy in order to seem normal and avoid ridicule. When her new teacher looks past the hard façade Ally put up, however, she is seen for her creativity and brightness. Through this acknowledgement, Ally is able to learn more about herself and come to understand there is more to humans than just their labels.

Ihimaera, Witi. *The Whale Rider*. Auckland: Reed Books, 1987. Print.

Offering a combination of reality and myth, this novel follows the story of a New Zealand legend of passion and adventure. Driven by the love of her community, her ancient gift of whale rider, and her determination to save her family, follow Kahu and her journey to becoming a leader in her male-dominated Maori tribe.

Kelly, Erin Entrada. *The Land of Forgotten Girls*. New York: Greenwillow Books, 2016.

Print.

A story of two Philippine sisters, abandoned by their father and forced to live in poverty in Louisiana, *The Land of Forgotten Girls* highlights the bond that comes with sisterhood and the resilience it takes to find hope in circumstances that otherwise seem hopeless.

Lai, Thanhha. *Inside Out and Back Again*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011.

Print.

Only knowing her loving home of Saigon, Hà is ripped away from the land she loves because of the spread of the Vietnam War. Immigrating to the United States, this narrative, written in verse, illustrates the struggle, grief, confusion, and ultimate healing that an immigrant child must undergo when searching for the only thing that can save him/her from war... hope.

Lai, Thanhha. *Listen, Slowly*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016. Print.

Out of touch teenager Mai is sent with her grandmother to Vietnam to uncover the true story of her grandfather's disappearance in the Vietnam War. Believing this to be one of the worst things her parents could have done to her, Mai is forced to find balance between the two cultures. This novel, through Mai's own revelations, illustrates to readers that the meaning of family, culture, and belonging can mean different things.

Laird, Elizabeth. *A Little Piece of Ground*. London: Macmillan Children's Books, 2003.

Print.

From the perspective of a young boy, this novel illustrates the human cost that comes with the occupation of Palestine lands. One of the most violent conflicts that afflicts modern day society, this story allows readers to better understand and come to empathy for those still affected by the divided nation.

Levine, Kristin. *The Lions of Little Rock*. New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 2012. Print.

It is 1958 and Marlee is starting a brand new middle school in Little Rock and feels completely isolated. That is, until she befriends Liz, a young woman Marlee wishes she could be. When Liz leaves school unexpectedly, though, because of being uncovered as passing for white, Marlee is prepared to take on segregation with her true friend no matter what the cost. This novel speaks to the true meaning of empathy and acceptance no matter the difference.

McCall, Guadalupe Garcia. *Summer of Mariposas*. New York: Lee & Low Books Inc., 2012.

Print.

This bilingual text follows the journey of four sisters determined to bring a lost man back to family. Mixed with hints of the supernatural, this Mexican American text celebrates the strength of sisterhood in an epic quest between the real and the magical.

McClellan, Danielle Y.C. *The Protector's Pledge: Volume 1 (Secrets of Oscuros)*. North Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015. Print.

JV cannot wait to explore Oscuros Forest. When one of his own disappears, however, JV is left with the choice to brave the dangerous forest or remain silent as it terrorizes the people around him. In his searching, JV unveils a shocking secret that forces him to question everything he thought he knew.

Mikaelsen, Ben. *Touching Spirit Bear*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 2001. Print.

Given the option of going to jail or joining a program on a remote Alaskan Island after committing a crime, what would you choose? Cole Matthews is left with just this choice. His choice, though, will leave him attempting to find redemption from his past, his victims, his final attacker, and even himself.

Mills, Wendy. *All that We Have Left*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2016. Print.

Following the paths of Jesse and Alia and the effects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, *All We Have Left* gives readers an inside understanding of what it is like to be a citizen who lost a family member and a victim of the collapse of the Twin Towers. Blending both modern and past narratives, this novel takes readers on a journey that ultimately encourages acceptance and love for all.

Muños Ryan, Pam. *Esperanza Rising*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 2000. Print

Esperanza had it all: a wealthy family, loving parents, a Mexican ranch all to herself, and doting servants, until it was all stripped away from her because of a murder in her family. Will they rise above the odds and travel to the United States or stay trapped in their horrific reality?

Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. Print.

"Monster!" The prosecutor labels Steve Harmin, a 16-year old on trial for the murder of a convenient store owner. Written like a movie script, Steve journals his perspective of what really happened that fateful day. Does he have the grit to endure the hardships of prison as well as the guilt he is feeling within himself? It is now in your hands to decide if Steve is a monster, or a human being who made a mistake. *Lights, cameras, action*: here is Steve's story.

Osa, Nancy. *Cuba 15*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2003. Print

Violet Paz is Polish, Cuban, and American. Although her family follows some of the Cuban culture (such as smoking cigars, playing dominos, and listening to Latin music, Violet knows little about her ethnic identity as a Cuban. Despite the negative stereotypes of Fidel Castro and his reign on Cuba, Violet remains open minded in her journey to explore where she comes from in a powerful coming of age narrative.

Palacio, R.J. *Wonder*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf., 2012. Print.

August Pullman was born with a facial deformity that has restricted him from going to a public school. Until now, he had been isolated from his community, believing that because of his physical difference he cannot be a member of society. Now going to school, though all he can dream about is being treated like everyone else. Following the narratives of multiple characters, this story highlights the struggles community members have with empathy, compassion, and acceptance of those different, illustrating to readers the dire necessity for total equality.

Park, Linda Sue. *A Long Walk to Water*. New York: Clarion Books, 2010. Print.

Based on a true story, this novel narrates the hardships that comes to two eleven-year-olds in Sudan. Despite their stark similarities, though, the narration of Nya is living in 2008 while Salva lived in 1985. Salva's story is one of resilience during a time of conflict where he becomes a "lost boy" of Sudan determined to find a safe haven for his family. Salva is a survivor, though,

and his story come to intersect with Nya's in a heartwarming and moving way.

Peters, Julia Anne. *Luna*. New York: Tune Warner Book Group, 2004. Print.

Liam cannot stand who he is during the day; by night, though, he is able to embody Luna, the female identity he truly believes he is. Provocative and raw, this novel highlights the constant struggles that come with finding one's identity as a transgender individual in a society that has not yet come to accept this self.

Philbrick, Rodman. *Freak the Mighty*. New York: Scholastic Inc., 1993. Print.

Do you have to be similar in order to be friends? *Freak the Mighty* grapples with this question when a slow learner, stuck in a giant body, and a brilliant boy in leg braces become friends. Through this forging of an unlikely friendship, however, the two create one human force that highlights the importance of acceptance.

Reilly-Gif, Patricia. *Lily's Crossing*. New York: Random House Children's Book, Inc., 1997. Print.

In 1944 Lily's innocent and joy-filled summer comes to a heartbreaking end when her father is drafted into the military. Isolated with only her grandmother in Rockaway, New York, Lily expectantly becomes friends with Albert, a Hungarian refugee. Follow the two children as they attempt to grapple with doubt, uncertainty, and their newfound friendship.

Resau, Laura. *Red Glass*. Delacorte Press, 2009. Print

Following the story of a Pedro, a Mexican immigrant who barely survived his trek to the United States, and Sophia, a US citizen, this novel highlights the love that can be shared between apparent strangers and the heartache that comes with having to leave behind an adoptive family.

Reynolds, Jason. *All American Boys*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2015. Print.

This novel illustrates the struggles two teen- one white and one black- must go through after a violent act leaves their school and community divided. Reflecting the racial tension present in modern day United States, this novel offers a safe space for readers to grapple with the reality of racial violence and how it can transform a society for better or for worse.

Reynolds, Jason. *As Brave As You*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2016. Print.

Following the surprising story of Genie and his new-found brother Ernie, this novel questions the meaning of bravery and becoming a man. Learning from their blind grandfather, the two boys are left confronted with deciding who they truly are as human beings and where their bravery truly lies.

Rhodes, Jewell Parker. *Sugar*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2013. Print.

Sugar lives on a sugar plantation along the Mississippi River. Slavery has been abolished but still, she and her family continue to labor on the field for little to no money. Sugar, though, has always wanted to learn more about the world and believes she is finally given that chance when Chinese workers come to the fields. Through an unlikely friendship, Sugar must grapple with bridging the cultural gap to better accept and understand her newfound friend.

Rose, Caroline Starr. *Blue Birds*. New York: Penguin Books, 2015. Print.

Following the friendship of a settler and a native, *Blue Birds* illustrates the friendship that can be created between two individuals no matter the social barriers created between them. Despite the tensions that rise around Alis and Kimi, however, the two show the true meaning of acceptance by risking their own lives for one another.

Rose, Judith Robbins. *Look Both Ways in the Barrio Blanco*. Somerville: Candlewick Press, 2015. Print.

Jacinta Juarez is left split between her identity as a Latina in the barrio and her hope for the future that does not involve cleaning rich peoples' homes when she is given the chance to be mentored. As her family becomes ripped apart, Jacinta must forge her two identities together in order to salvage her shattered home.

Sheth, Kashmira. *Blue Jasmine*. New York: Charlotte Sheedy Literary Agency, 2004. Print.

Twelve-year-old Seema Trivedi must move from her home in India to Iowa City in the United States. Devastated by having to leave her beautiful home and best friends, she finds herself feeling isolated in her new place of inhabitation. As she begins to plant her roots in her new home, though, she is able to bridge the two cultures together and truly unveil to readers the meaning of home and family.

Walters, Eric. *Walking Home*. Toronto: Double Day Canada, 2014. Print.

Muchoki and his sister Jata were living in a thriving Kenyan village when everything was ripped away from them. Unable to recognize their lives after political violence killed their father and they are forced to live with their sick mother in a refugee camp, the two set out on a journey to find the remaining family they have left. Driven by hope, the two venture on what appears to be an impossible quest.

Williams-Garcia, Rita. *One Crazy Summer*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010. Print.

Written from the perspective of three elementary-aged sisters, this novel follows their journey to California to meet the woman who abandoned them as their mother many years ago. Set during the tumultuous Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the three sisters are thrown into the Black Panthers community, left to find out who they truly are as black Americans in a time of racism, inequality, and empowerment.

Wittlinger, Ellen. *Hard Love*. New York: Simon & Schuster Book, 1999. Print.

Wittlinger's raw narrative of a young boy's devastation towards his parents' divorce and plea to find the true meaning of love resonates with everyone who is and has ever been a teenager. Looking for solace in his self-proclaimed "Puerto Rican Cuban Yankee Lesbian" friend Marisol, John is left to explore the pains of growing up in an unlikely friendship.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Behind You*. New York: Penguin Young Readers Group, 2004. Print.

A moving narrative of love and loss, Woodson captures the true devastation that comes with the grief of a murderous death in all community members. Following the love story of Ellie and

Miah, readers are able to experience the feeling of loss and the strength of relationships it takes to overcome despair.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *Brown Girl Dreaming*. New York: Puffin Books, 2014. Print.

In this collection of poems Woodson shares what life was like as an African American female living in the south during the Civil Rights movement. Filled with raw emotions, childhood innocence, and the longing to belong, this novel offers readers a glimpse into the struggle minority citizens must face to survive in their home.

Yang, Gene Luen, *American Born Chinese*. New York: First Second, 2007. Print.

Through the use of a graphic novel, Yang illustrates the story of a young Chinese boy just trying to fit into his largely white world. Through this story's humor and realistic depiction of life as a minority, readers are able to visualize the strength it takes to overcome racism and come to self-acceptance of all individual's identities.

Yousafzai, Malala. *I Am Malala*. London: Orion Publishing Group Ltd, 2013. Print.

How far would you go to protect your right to an education? Malala Yousafzai took it so far as to risk her life against the Taliban in hope of legalizing education for girls in her country. As she fights for equality, Malala's oppressors attempt to silence her, but she continues to prevail despite the adversity ahead. Follow this inspirational young woman on her journey towards education equality and the motivation that conquers against all odds. Can one 15-year-old girl survive against an Taliban army of 45,000?

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